

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
LAWRENCE**

**INFORMANT: WILLIAM LUKAS
INTERVIEWER: YILDEREY ERDENER
DATE: MARCH 29, 1989**

**Y = YILDEREY
W = WILLIAM**

SG-LA-T541

Y: Today is March 20, 29th, 1989. And uh, my guest is (W: William Lukas). Lukas, you spell with C, or K?

W: K, L U K A S.

Y: Yeah. And your address?

W: 75 Cypress Avenue, Lawrence.

Y: Cypress? Um, birth date, and place?

W: December 11th, 1914. (Y: Where?) Lawrence. (Y: Lawrence) Born in Lawrence.

Y: What street?

W: I just told (--) Oh, what street I was born on? (Y: Yes) Union Street.

Y: South Union, or Union?

W: No, Union.

Y: Union, umhm. And uh, you said are Lithuanian, your parents?

W: That's right. I'm of Lithuanian decent, 100%.

Y: 100%. What does it mean?

W: Fully blooded Lithuanian. No intermarriage.

Y: So your parents came from there, or your grandparents?

W: My parents both came from Lithuania. Through Germany, into the United States.

Y: Is there any story associated with immigration, or the parents? Family stories? Sometimes there are stories.

W: No, my father and mother never talked about how they came across. All they came in steerage, which meant thousands of them, all crowded in one spot on the ship. And they came into the United States. My father settled in Pennsylvania, and my mother settled in Lawrence. And by some fluke, or accident they both met each other and married.

Y: When did they come, do you know? I mean around what uh?

W: Uh, I would say, they must have come into the United States about 1911, or 1912.

Y: And then how, you said your father came to Pennsylvania? How did he come to Lawrence?

W: Well it all depends on who sponsored you in the United States. That's how you got into this country. If somebody sponsored you, you had a job, well they welcomed you into the country, and that's how you got in.

Y: Do you know how your parents met each other?

W: No, I don't. They never said a word about how they met, or where they met. That is a page that's a blank in my history.

Y: Yeah. And what is your parent, your mother's name, or father's name, your parent's name?

W: Well of course my father's name was Lukas most naturally.

Y: I mean not last name, but first name.

W: Anthony. (Y: Anthony?) And my mother's name was Phyllis.

Y: What are the Lithuanian names? For Anthony, it's uh (--)

W: Antanus. (Y: Antanus?) Antanus, it's almost like Greek. I think the Greeks are really associated with the Lithuanians, because their names are so familiar. Like uh, Antanus is Anthony, is Anthony in Greek too. My mother's name, jeese, I can't think of what her name was. How they said Phyllis in Lithuania, but there was a name. It's such a long time since I used it, it's been erased from my memory.

Y: And when were you, were they born? Your parents, do you know the year?

W: Oh, let's see, my mother would be about 92 now. So, if she was alive. So that would be about 1800 and (--)

Y: 1898, or something?

W: Something like that, yeah.

Y: And your father?

W: Father, he's about, he'd be about 93, 94 now, if he was alive. So I would say about 1880's, or 90's, in that area.

Y: Yeah.

W: We never did discuss when they were born. They never mentioned it. We had no occasion to ask them.

Y: If you ask me when my father was born, I couldn't tell you.

W: Well that's, well we never did pry into what our parents did, as long as everything was going good, nobody asked when did you come, or where did you go, or how you came? (Y: Yeah, right) Now they settled in Lawrence because there was a large population of Lithuanian people here in Lawrence. That's one reason I know. And uh, of course my father worked in Textiles all his life. And my mother worked for awhile in the Everett Mills, the cotton mills. Then she quit, she never went back to work after that.

Y: Where did he work?

W: Well he worked in the Pacific. He worked in J. P. Stevens.. And I think he worked for a short time in the Wood Mill as a weaver. But I don't think he could take weaving. He wasn't that strong a man.

Y: How many siblings are you altogether?

W: Four. (Y: besides you?) Besides myself.

Y: So altogether five then?

W: There were five of us.

Y: Boys or girls?

W: There were three boys and two girls.

Y: Are they alive?

W: Uh, four of us a live.

Y: And where did they work?

W: My sister was a secretary. My youngest brother was a maintenance, he was in maintenance, and then he owned a rest home. My oldest brother worked for an oil company. (Y: What company?) And oil company. Maybe he worked for Amaco, I don't know. Oh no, I think he worked for Standard Oil Company of New York.

Y: So you are the only one who worked in the Textile?

W: Well I was the only one that worked in the Textiles. Yeah, I stayed closer to home.

Y: Are you the youngest one?

W: In the middle. (Y: In the middle) I'm the second oldest. My brother, my oldest brother, then me, then my youngest brother, and my sister.

Y: Yeah, and uh, last question is about your wife? Her name and birth?

W: Ann, my wife's maiden name was Kisley. Ann Kisley. She was born in 1918 I believe. April 14th, 1918.

Y: Is she Lithuanian decent?

W: No, she's Russian.

Y: So 100% what is uh, (--)

W: She is 100% Russian. There were no intermarriages. In those days all the people frowned on anybody intermarrying, regardless who you were, whether you were Irish and you married a Lithuanian girl, the Irish would be hollering like hell. Why did you marry a Lithuanian girl when you could have married an Irish girl? And the same thing went to the Lithuanian girls. They'd marry and Irish, or Italians. There was, you see the old folks came from their own countries. They didn't intermarry. They married their own. And their folks expected the children to do the same thing when they came to this country.

Y: When, when did they start (W: intermarrying?) intermarrying each other.

W: I would say about the 1940's. (Y: 40's) Late, early 1940's.

Y: When did you get married?

W: I got married in 1938?

Y: '38. So you were twenty-four? (W: Umhm) How come you dared marrying a Russian?

W: I didn't find any Lithuanian girls that I liked, to be honest with you. They were too bossy.

Y: Did your parents oppose your uh (--)

W: They did. To a certain extent they did, but my mother said, "you made your bed, now you lye in it."

Y: How did it go in those days? I mean did you, where did you meet your wife?

W: I met my wife at a dance hall believe it or not. That was our social night. Saturday nights you'd go dancing, Sundays you'd go to a movie. That was all you could do.

Y: Dancing where? Lithuanian Club, or what other place?

W: No. We had dance halls. We had the recreation ball. No, in those days at first we had, we had the Rose Line Ball Room, then you had Lakeview Ballroom. You had Kimball's Starlight Ballroom. You had oh, so many places we had.

Y: All in Lawrence?

W: No, these were in town, out of town, and everywhere. But that was how you met the girls. There was no other way you could meet them really. There were no clubs like there are today, to meet anybody. So you socialized through the dancing, and you uh, Sundays you made a date to go out to a movie. And that was your whole weekend.

Y: Which, which dancing club was that? I mean where did you meet her? I mean uh, (--)

W: The Rose Line Ballroom. (Y: Rose Line) Rose Line.

Y: And then took her on Sunday to a, (--)

W: To a movie if it struck my fancy I wanted to take her out.

Y: Obviously it did.

W: Well it took a little time before the ice fog. [Laughs]

Y: I was told there were many movies theaters in Lawrence.

W: Yes, yes, we had, well it's a well known fact that we had more movie houses on one street than any place in the world. I think, "Hi Tony", I think we had let's see, there was the Palace Theater, the Broadway Theater, there was the Modern Theater, there was a Strand Theater.

Y: Spell those names?

W: Victoria Theater.

Y: Victoria is clear, but the other theaters, what was the name of the first one?

W: The Palace Theater.

Y: The Palas, P A L A S

W: P A L A C E, Palace, just like a King's Palace.

Y: C E, palace. All right. Yes, right, palace.

W: Then you had your Broadway Theater. Then you had your Modern. Then you had (--)

Y: What was that? Modern?

W: Modern. Then you had the Strand Theater. And across the street was the Victoria Theater. So that's all in one little area of maybe one, not even a block. So you had your choice of six movies practically, which made it good. Then you had, you had your Empire Theater on Lawrence Street, it was known as the Warner Theater. Then you had another theater on Essex Street. Right now the name escapes me. Then you had two other theaters. They're all over the place.

Y: Then after you got married did you move out from your parents?

W: Yes, we had to. Not that we had to, but we did.

Y: Immediately?

W: Immediately, because we were both working so we could afford a place of our own.

Y: Where did you, what was the first street, first house?

W: First house was Hannigan Street.

Y: Hannikan?

W: Hannigan's, right off Park Street, which you wouldn't dare go near now. That's where all the Puerto Ricans moved in.

Y: Is the house still there?

W: I imagine it is. I think I rode by there once years ago, the house was still standing there. Of course the rents in those days were very cheap, three dollars a week.

Y: Three dollars? So you were paid weekly, huh?

W: You paid weekly. There was no such thing as monthly. Then if you went to a store in those days you had credit. Like you go to a store to buy an article, they would issue you a book.

Y: Yeah, tell me about that. No one told me about those things. But I mean I heard from here and there, but there's no recording.

W: Oh well, first you'd go to this store. Now you probably would go with a person that's well known to the store keeper in order to establish credit.

Y: Are we talking about grocery stores?

W: We're talking about grocery stores only. Well if you went with your parents, and they shopped there all the time, your credit was established immediately, that's providing your father or mother paid their bill every week. So you go in there and you get a book. He has a master book, and you have a book of your own. So if you buy a pound of potatoes for ten cents, he enters it into his master book, and your book. At the end of the week he tallies out the total, which you do yourself at home, so you won't get cheated, and you paid him off. And that kept on going. But a lot of grocers during the depression lost money on the deal, because a lot of people renege. I know a fact of one grocer who lost a lot of money, over one hundred thousand dollars. That was a lot of money in those days.

Y: Just gave out?

W: People didn't pay. People are funny.

Y: Did not pay, or maybe could not?

W: Did not pay, didn't want to pay. You know there are free loaders everywhere no matter where you go. That's only human nature. What you can get for nothing you'll take, and that's what they did. And then people got stuck. Not the people got stuck, but the grocer got stuck.

Y: And then uh, what would you say? When those stores started disappearing uh (--)

W: Supermarkets came in.

Y: Which was 19 uh, (--)

W: Supermarkets came in, oh I would say in the late 40's. (Y: 50's?) 50's. (Y: 40's) We had a lot of good chains in here. We had, there were a lot of good stores downtown. There was uh, let me think. There was the Mohegan Market. It was a big, very big market. Then there was uh, right now the names escape me. Isn't that funny. Your mind goes blank.

Y: Well that's all right.

W: Brockleman's was another one. Right. (Y: Umhm) Then there was a Syrian Market. It was a big market. That's where all the people shopped. Now people in those days used to walk three or four miles to go shopping downtown, which they wouldn't even step out of their car nowadays to walk fifty steps. There was a big difference in those days. People walked more. People interchanged their ideas more, because they shopped together. And they, it was more or less like half a social event, and half shopping. In other words it's like one great big market. Everybody goes through the same place. But there were no cars in those days, so people were more friendly. Nowadays, forget it. Everybody goes east, north, west, and south to go shopping.

Y: You told me two weeks ago that the cars uh (--)

W: The cars were the ruination of the neighborhoods, right.

Y: Right. How did you explain that?

W: Easily. In the days before cars, before even I had a car, we walked. In order to go anywhere you either rode a bus, or you walked, or you went by train. Now if you went by train it was a \$1.00 round trip to Boston. That's a half a dollar one way, and a half a dollar back. Now if you wanted to go to Lowell, Haverhill, or down the beach, it was a possibility you could get a bus. And that was only a quarter, or a dime. And the busses here in Lawrence were only five cents. But when the automobile came out (Y: which was?), which was the sounding board for everything going to hell really, because we had a big bus strike in Lawrence.

Y: I was going to ask about that. (W: Well) That was in 19 uh(--)

W: Oh, I don't know the year. It was in the maybe 50's, or late 40's. But when we had that bus strike people started saying to themselves, well we can't depend on the bus company any more. To they went out and started buying cars. Well they might have bought them on credit, but that's when the cars started coming into the picture.

Y: How long did the strike last?

W: Oh, weeks, months. That's the reason for that. But the reason why the neighborhood went to hell was the minute people started buying cars they were at liberty to go to the beach any time they wanted to. So gradually the cars started pulling away from the neighborhood. The people themselves. In other words, if say Sunday all the neighbors got together, and the fathers and mothers, they got together, mostly fathers and mothers, they get together on Sunday, they gossip and they have their own times. They have a little barbecue going, or something like that. The automobile took that away, because now you'd ask them, well are you coming over today? Oh no, we're going to Boston. If you ask, well there's a play in town. Oh no, we're going to Haverhill to a dance. Well you could see how things were starting to pull apart. They weren't polarized anymore, they were just starting to shift away from each other.

Y: Didn't you socialize in Lithuanian clubs? I understand there is a few. There's one (--)

W: Yes, we had a club here, it was very popular, Lithuanian Club, was the Lyra Hall. I was a

member there.

Y: Is that where John Umpa used to play piano?

W: I don't think so. I think John Umpa, there were two churches in Lawrence that were Lithuanian. One was a national church, which was the same as the Catholic religion, but was never under the Pope, whereas the Catholic religion was under the Pope. So what happened, the mother church was Saint Francis here in Lawrence, a Lithuanian Church. The people got disgusted with the priest that was in charge at that time, and they formed their own church, which is the one on Garden Street.

Y: What was the reason, why did they get upset with uh (--)

W: Well they probably didn't like the way he was addressing the Congregation, or maybe he was asking for too much money. You know, in those days the priest used to come around to each parishioner, every year, and ask so much to give to the parish. Well maybe he asked for too much money. I never went into it deeply to find out why they broke away, because I was pretty young then anyway. Maybe about eight or nine years old. So (--)

Y: Where did your parents go?

W: The National Church. (Y: The National?) Yeah, they broke away from the Mother Church. I was Christened and Baptized in a Roman Catholic Church. And automatically I became a Roman Catholic whether I liked it or not.

Y: And um, someone told me that there were [kitchen?] parts in those days, 1930's, that's why you uh (--)

W: Well that's what I was referring to before. That's before the cars came in. People would gather in their home, or in the clubs that they had here, and have their little social gatherings, or social affairs.

Y: What do they talk about usually. I mean uh, that's a tough question, but uh, if you would uh, did you depend on all of those uh (--)

W: But I was too young to find out what they were talking. You don't mingle with adults when you're a child. They just push you aside. Go play. Whatever they talked about, I don't know. I imagined they gossiped and did everything else that we do as seniors now.

Y: I mean including work? Work situations?

W: Work, I imagine they, yes, where there were better jobs they probably translated to each other, or they talked it out where a better job was, or whether they were hiring or firing, or laying off. In those days everybody went for the better job if they could get it. But textiles were a very very poor place to work in, because they were seasonal. You worked eight months, you were laid off four months. If you were lucky enough to be in a department that worked 52 weeks a

year, you had a good job. But most people got laid off. And some of the women liked that situation, because it gave them time to get away from work.

Y: Umhm. Where did you go to school?

W: In Lawrence.

Y: Yeah, but what school?

W: What school? I went to the Park Street School when I was in the first and second grade. Then I transferred over to the Tarbock School. From the Tarbock School I went to Lawrence High School, and I graduated from Lawrence High. (Y: Which year?) 1932.

Y: That was the year when everyone had trouble.

W: Depression.

Y: Depression. Lots of depressed people around.

W: Well I wouldn't say they were depressed, I would say they were out of work.

Y: Economically.

W: Yeah, economically. They were depressed in the sense they weren't working, but they were a happy-go-lucky bunch. They got by.

Y: What comes to your mind when you think back to 1930's? Is there anything uh (--)

W: Yes. One thing that comes to my mind that's very vivid. In those days when we graduated you were suppose to have a dark blue suit. That was the standard uniform of graduation. My father and mother couldn't afford a suit. So I went with a jacket that my father had, and it fit me, and an odd pair of pants. I was lucky to have that. That struck me. Until this day I still remember it. Not many kids had blue suits. Not many. It was a jumbled up affair.

Y: Can you tell me about the neighborhood in those days?

W: Well the one I vividly (--)

Y: Or relatives, and there were friends.

W: No, we didn't more around. You know, there's an old saying, the farther away a relative lives, the better you appreciate him. And I found that out to be true. Now when my father, one I remember vividly was the one when we lived out on Lowell Street. My father owned his own home. And our neighbors were composed mostly of 95% Irish. We were the only Lithuanian people living within ten blocks. And many a day I got into fights. But I won quite a few fights, so they respected us, and didn't bother us. As a matter of fact we became chummy, and to this

day we even talk to each other.

Y: What was the reason of the fight?

W: Ethnic groups. That was the reason. Remember you are now Lithuanian coming into a totally Irish district. Now how would you feel? You wouldn't feel at home. First thing they do is pick on you. They call you a (--) See, people had a funny notion in those days. Anybody that was Polish, Russian, [Histonian] Latvian, and Lithuanian were called Polocks.

Y: All of these people? Say it again? Russian, Lithuanian.

W: Russian, Lithuanian, [Histonian], Latvian.

Y: Just one category, Polocks, whether (--)

W: Whether you were or not. So I used to have to explain to the Irish what a Polock was, and what a Lithuanian Polock was. I said, "they're the same distinguish, they're the same difference between an Irishman and an Italian." Oh, they could see that right away. Oh yes, yes, yes, there's a big difference, but they could never distinguish between a Lithuanian, and a Polishman, or a Russian because they were Slavik. They all had the same features. They were whites, but they had the same features, but the tongues were [unclear] different. That's languages completely. A Polishman couldn't talk to a Lithuanian. But a Lithuanian could talk to a Polishman. The reason for that was Poland took over Lithuanian, oh, I don't know what year. And they had to learn how to speak Polish. But the Polish people never spoke Lithuanian. That was the same with the Russians when they took over the Polish people. Now they've made them learn Polish, which they're doing now. Yeah.

Y: How did you strike back? How did you call the Irish people when they called (--)

W: Stupid. (Y: Huh?) Stupid!

Y: Was there another name for Irish?

W: Mics. (Y: Mics?) Mics, yeah.

Y: Was it still used in those days?

W: It's still used to this day, Mics. It's a synonym that stuck with the Irish, it stuck with the Liths, it was stuck with the Polock. It sticks with every race.

Y: When did the, Liths was used? Later they referred (--)

W: Liths were used because it's an abbreviation, L I T H. So it was easy to say Liths, or Poles, P O L E S.

Y: What does Mics mean?

W: That I don't know, what an Irish Mics. Who knows, maybe it's mickey, an abbreviation, a mickey, or Michael. I don't know.

Y: But I guess they felt like uh (--)

W: Those are insults they threw at each other.

Y: No, I mean the Irish people, since they came in the 19th century, those are the first immigrant groups. They felt like uh (--)

W: They had an advantage over everybody else.

Y: Americans, they spoke the same language.

W: Right, that was the big advantage that they had. They could speak English, and they got the better jobs and everything else. Because the Limmies, now there's one for you, the English, which they were called the Limmies. (Y: And what's that?) The English were called Limmies. (Y: Limmies. Hm, I never) They had textiles in England. So when they moved out from England, they came to the United States, they took over the jobs as managers, and bosses, and superintendents, because they new the business. There was a time when they wouldn't hire Irish, but that's beyond. Why, I don't know.

Y: Yeah. And last week someone told me that following Labor Day, all mills were closed for ten days.

W: No necessarily so. They closed for a day, just on Labor Day. You went back to work the next day.

Y: But some mills would close ten days?

W: Well that might have been their vacation week. That's the only reason I can remember.

Y: How do you remember it?

W: Well back in uh, let's see, I got out in Textiles back in '48 I believe. No, it was later than that. I got out of Textiles in '64. I never knew we had two weeks vacation. (Y: No, one. Well) Not even one week to celebrate Labor Day. No. Labor Day was just one day. Even today it's only one day.

Y: Yeah, I know, but that person was very sure. He said uh, I was wondering if it was earlier when his father was working, that uh (--)

W: They closed down in July for two weeks.

Y: Maybe that is what it was.

W: Yeah, because the weather was so hot, and orders weren't coming. Because they really, the mills started up always to the Fall and run till June. And then July and August would be a lay-off, September and October before they picked up again.

Y: So what, what kind of celebration did uh (--)

W: No really. Fireworks here in town. They used to have fireworks. The unions came in to Textiles after awhile. All the unions would put aside so much money through (--)

Y: Picnics? What about picnics?

W: They had picnics too. Well that's only a gimmick that the unions used so that they'd have more members. The more members they have, the more money they have to spend, which was only a common sense thing. But the unions never did anything for Textiles workers, not really. They sold it out, they sold out to the big, big textile people, like the Wood Mill, Pacific Mill. Pacific Mill, the unions could never get in. (Y: Never?) Never. Never. (Y: How come?) They just wouldn't allow them. Management just, the minute union man came on, they'd call the cops. Out he'd go!

Y: When did you start working. So you are uh (--)

W: 1934 I believe, the first job I ever had in Textile.

Y: 1934. So you graduated in 1932. What did you do two years?

W: Nothing.

Y: Just hang around?

Side A ends

Side B begins

W: No way!

Y: Well I mean how did you spend your time? What did you do? Do you remember?

W: Oh, I was a great outdoors man. I did a lot of fishing, hunting, trapping. Played baseball, football, we kept occupied, but legally. We didn't steal cars, because there was no cars to steal.

Y: In those days uh, in those days what could one do bad things? Like today they do drugs and drinking. Bad boys in those days, what did they do? Not necessarily you, but uh (--)

W: Bad boys in those days would play hooky. (Y: Hooky?) Hooky, yeah, that's (Y: what's that?) don't go to school. In other words, stay out from school. Then they send the truant officer after him. And they sent him to reform school too if you stayed out enough. But it cured you of playing hooky. There wasn't really much. We didn't have as many cars when prohibition was repealed, because if there was a drinking problem it never surfaced in driving cars, drunk driving. Cars were few and far between. (Y: Yeah) So there was no problem there. But I don't know. There was gambling. Yes, there was gambling in my day. And there was horse betting. But you had to have money to do all that. And if you didn't have the money you wouldn't pay attention to the gambling, because they, where there's no incentive, without money there's no incentive to gamble.

Y: How did they gamble?

W: Well they played horses. They played 50 cents on a horse. That was the minimum bet a horse. And uh, the most a bookie would pay was \$32.00. In other words, if the horse came in a paid \$80.00, and you had a two dollar bet on that horse, all you got was \$32.00. That's the limit. So.

Y: And um, (--)

W: There wasn't much you could do wrong, unless you broke (--) Or your could steal, rob, I forgot about robbing, but there weren't many robberies. Because you always got to remember, there weren't many cars to drive away from a robbery. You had to walk or run. And that's where you were licked.

Y: Okay, how did you find your job, first job?

W: I never found it. It found me.

Y: Oh. Okay, how did it find you?

W: Well I was in a bowling alley one day, and I was setting pins just to make a few extra dollars for myself.

Y: Where was this?

W: Setting pins. (Y: Where?) In the recreation. (Y: Bowling) Bowling ball, yeah. And I got hit by a pin. I got hit in the leg and my leg swelled up like a balloon. There was no insurance in those days. So when I limped off the alley this man came up to me, he said to me, do you want a job? He looked at my foot, and I says, would I love a job, but all I can do is this. He says, you report to me when your leg comes down and I'll give you a job. He was a boss in one of the textile mills. And that's how I started my first job, was in a shipping room.

Y: Where was that?

W: In the shipping room.

Y: Wood Mill?

W: No, it was in the Pacific.

Y: Pacific Mill.

W: The Wood Mill didn't come till about 1936, '38.

Y: So when your foot was all right, then you (--)

W: I went to work for this man. He was a wonderful man to work for.

Y: Can you tell me your first day, what you remember? You're a young person, your were about what? Twenty years old?

W: Oh no. I graduated from school about sixteen. I was about eighteen years old when I went to work.

Y: Eighteen years old a young person walks in to mill.

W: Well the first thing that I knew, I was right next to the weave room and I told myself, "I'll never work in that place." The noise was terrific. You go home at night and all you can hear is bum, bum, bum, bum. So I said, no, that's not for me. So I learned the job of shipping while I was in there. I mean the man that I work for was a, he was really bad. I mean he was a stool pigeon. He reported everybody, or anybody. They finally fired him for that. But beside the point, when he was gone, I used to sneak into his office. I'd look at all of his papers and everything. That's how I learned how to do shipping and receiving.

Y: So what did you ship?

W: Oh, we shipped out yarn, and we shipped out cloth. What could you ship out in the textiles? There was no jam to ship out. We only make cloth.

Y: I mean where, where did you send them?

W: Well we sent them out to different companies. One company we'll say would be a uh, well let me see, a clothing manufacturer. We'd send it out to him. Rolls and rolls of cloth. Or (--)

Y: How long did you work there?

W: Oh, I would say I worked in the Pacific for about a year, get laid off. (Y: One year?) One year. Get laid off, call back, work another year, get laid off. And I went down to the Lowell Pacific and I worked in a card room for awhile. Then I got a job upstairs as a shipper, which was on my record that I was a shipper. And from there I had it pretty well made. I mean I really work hard in Textiles, I'll be honest. I had it easy. That's because I had a little knowledge, and

that's because I had a high school education. A lot of kids didn't have high school education. They went right to work. In other words when they turned sixteen they got into the mill. But when it came to doing figures or something, they didn't know what end was up.

Y: Yeah, well those who had the high school diploma like you, (--)

W: That was not a requirement, a high school diploma in textiles.

Y: Why did you get a diploma? I mean uh (--)

W: Let me put it this way. What could you do in the height of the Depression? Let me ask you that question. You couldn't get a job. You're not going to hang around a corner. So you might as well finish school. You had one alternative. Either finish school, or hand around the corner. I prefer to go to school. Kept out of harms way.

Y: Was there any possibility of going to college, or something in those days?

W: Never, never. How could you go to college. Your father was making sixteen dollars a week.

Y: I mean scholarship, or anything like that?

W: Well there were no scholarships offered. The only scholarships that were offered were to extraordinary pupils, and I mean extraordinary. You had to be the head of the class, period. And that's the whole class. Maybe one scholarship would be offered.

Y: So there was no such uh possibility?

W: There was no incentives. The only incentive you had, if your father was in business and made enough money, he'd send you to college. My father told me right off the bat, "I can't sent you to college, I can't afford it." I knew that. He didn't have to tell me that. So you had to work your way up. You were bound, gagged, right there in that area. You just couldn't do nothing.

Y: You had two sisters?

W: I had two sisters. One died when she was very young, and the other one is still alive.

Y: Did they graduate from high school?

W: My youngest sister graduated from one of the better schools in Boston, Secretarial Schools. I forget the name of it now.

Y: It's after high school?

W: Yeah, after high school. Everything has to be after high school.

Y: All your brothers and sisters, did they graduate from high school?

W: My brother didn't. Neither one of them. Just my sister. She went to Catherine Gibbs Secretarial School in Boston. This is one of the better known schools in Boston.

Y: Just you as a boy, and then two sisters graduated from high school.

W: No, one sister graduated from high school.

Y: One sister, one brother. One sister and you.

W: Yup.

Y: And the rest?

W: The rest, they went on their own. They picked up things. Like my oldest brother got a job in Boston with Standard Oil. My youngest brother, he got into uh, well he married a woman with a lot of money anyway. And he, they managed the rest homes that she had.

Y: So when you got your pay envelope, was it yours, when you were living with your parents?

W: Never mine completely. You always had to pay. There was an understanding, it's a silent understanding. You paid Board and Room. What was left you bought your clothes, your spending money.

Y: In other words, did you open your envelope or not?

W: Yes, you always opened up your envelope, because you were paid in cash and you wanted to know how much (--)

Y: Well the reason why I'm asking, because many people told me that they never touched the money. They gave uh (--)

W: That is a fallacy. That is, what they meant in reality was, when they get paid everybody opened is envelope to see how much money he got. They made mistakes too you know?

Y: You could be short changed a days work, and all you had to do is march into the office and say, "I worked all week, how come?" And they looked it up, "oh yeah, you did. Here's your money."

W: What they meant is, after they looked at the money they got, they had it in the envelope to the mother and father. That's what they meant.

Y: What about you?

W: Did the same thing.

Y: So you did not take one dollar, or two?

W: Oh, I took out (--) If I had made fifteen dollars a week, I [background voice] took ten dollars and gave it to my mother for board and room, which was a lot of money in those days. And I kept five for myself. But out of that five I had to have my spending money, and all the clothes I ever bought had to come out of that five. All the, anything that I needed had to come out of that five dollars.

Y: Some people told me uh, Italians especially, they give the envelope to the father, or mother.

W: Father, never the mother.

Y: And he or she (W: doled out) gave him or her one dollar or two. (W: Right) It was not the case with you. (W: No, no) You took your money back, I mean whatever you needed, and gave the rest to your mother, or father?

W: My mother. My father.

Y: She was the one who took care of it?

W: She was the one that bought the groceries and everything for the house, but never for you. Because when I used to take out the five dollars, she new she didn't have to buy me a suit. She knew I didn't have to go and ask her for a dollar to go dancing. That had to come out of my five dollars.

Y: How much did you make in those days, the first job?

W: When I first started off, I think it was about oh, I would say about sixteen dollars a week.

Y: That was pin setting?

W: No. The first job I ever had was pin setting. I made more than sixteen dollars, but you worked a lot harder, and a lot longer. You worked six days a week, but in the mill I'm talking about I made sixteen dollars a week. So I gave a little to my mother and kept five. If I get seventeen, I gave my mother twelve and I kept five.

Y: Can you tell me a little bit about so called divisional labor in your house. What did your mother do, and what did your father do. What did the kids do? Was there such a division? You, my kid, you do this and that. And your parents who (--)

W: You were assigned jobs?

Y: I mean silently, or not silently, what uh (--) For example, what did your mother do? You said that she did grocery shopping? She did uh (--)

W: The mother took care of the house completely. She did the washing, did the shopping, and saw to it there was enough money to pay the rent, and (--) And father, he just brought his money in and gave it to my mother. And she was actually the financier of the house. That's why my mother didn't work, is because she took care of everything. And the kids, well the kids, if they had chores to do, well they had to do them. My brother had to take out the garbage, and I had to go down cellar to get the potatoes, or what, that was our jobs. But as, and she did the cooking too, your mother. That's another thing. The women worked hard in those days.

Y: What about your father, what did he do at home.

W: He just worked. Well if he, at home he just worked. And he had a big garden in the summer. Took care of the garden, and saw that the kids were well mannered and well trained.

Y: I thought the Italians were especially interested in gardens?

W: No really.

Y: So you had a garden? Or your father?

W: My father had a garden. (Y: Where was that?) It all depends, all most Europeans came from Farms. They didn't come in from the inner cities, they came from farms. Those were the ones that were the least happy with their lot. So that's why they came to America to improve their lot. But most of them were farmers. So automatically they looked for a piece of land to grow vegetables. It's in them, it's born in them.

Y: Where did you have your gardens.?

W: My gardens? (Y: I mean your father) We had all the vegetables you could think of, and it was very good.

Y: No, what I meant was uh, as you know, the Italians, they went to Prospect Hill in (W: Pleasant Valley) Pleasant Valley. And they built a little uh (--) (W: yeah, well) Was it the same thing with your father.

W: My father had the land, he didn't have to worry about it, because he had bought a home with a nice piece of land.

Y: That was where your house was?

W: Right.

Y: That's what I was asking?

W: Yeah. Yeah. He had the land in the back yard there, and we utilized it. He grew rabbits. He sold rabbits for extra money. We grew about everything.

Y: Would you tell me a little bit more? Because my impression is in those days people, regardless of ethnicity, Italian, or Lithuanian, or German, they were productive people. They produced things. Today you and I, we just consume things. We don't really bother to produce. That's why I'm interested to hear a little be more.

W: Well let's put it this way. My father and my mother, and your father and your mother had crafts in the old country. If they had crafts. Most naturally if they came over here they would bring their craft with them. And if things got boring they would actually go back into the craft that they were doing and start making the things they did in the old country and try to sell them. That was the same thing as now. I mean when I was a kid, it was the same thing. My father was brought up on the farms. So he wanted a little piece of land to grow vegetables. He did.

Y: What kind of vegetables?

W: Oh, you name it. Cabbage, beets, String beans, peppers, onions, (Y: tomatoes?) tomatoes, yes, quite a bit. Enough to feed the family.

Y: What about rabbits, what else?

W: Well that, rabbits was only a side line. That's only for extra money. That took time, and that was left up to us kids to feed him. Go around to the stores and get lettuce leaves that they peeled off the lettuce, and all kinds of garbage that you feed the rabbits with. It was a clean job. I mean it wasn't dirty.

Y: How much did you, do you remember how much you sold for?

W: Well my father used to sell them for, I remember one deal, he had twelve rabbits that brought him sixty dollars. And he thought it was a lot of money at that time. Five dollars a piece. The Belgians used to come up from Water Street. And oh, when they found out my father had rabbits, he had about twenty customers in one day. He never had enough to sell to everybody, but whatever he did have automatically was sold.

Y: What about chickens, and pigs, and [unclear]?

W: No, people didn't like chickens. I'll tell you why. They were too dirty, chickens. And another thing, you'd have to have a rooster with them too. And they, and every morning you'd hear a rooster go off, you get ticked off, you know what I mean. No, very few chickens.

Y: So that, that was an Irish neighborhood, was it?

W: It was in an Irish neighborhood. 100%

Y: The street name was?

W: Willow Street. (Y: Huh?) Willow Street! Then a few Lithuanian people came in later on, but not that many. It was strictly an Irish area.

Y: So in other words, you father worked and then he produced such things like [unclear] and uh (--)

W: Yeah, if it wasn't enough he'd go down to the market and buy enough so he would, my mother would can them. And we, all the kids would help in, and peeling, cleaning, setting the jars up and everything like that. You probably have about 100 jars of tomatoes. You'd have about forty jars of beans. In those days, beets, my mother never canned. What we had, what we called an earth cellar. There was no cement. So my father would buy enough sand, and he's make a bin down there and put all the potatoes in with the beets, and they would keep that way all year.

Y: Was it fun? I mean uh, to can all those things?

W: Well you can't call it fun, yet you couldn't call it labor. I mean it was a necessity and you, you just went on from there. You know it was good to have it, and you just went down. Nobody cried about going down and doing this, or doing that.

Y: Well I can imagine it helped the family budget. I mean those (--)

W: Oh, definitely that was the idea behind it. After all, if there's only one person working and he has five children, you're not going to go very far on sixteen dollars a week. You know yourself.

Y: Yeah, you're the good person to ask. Why do you think that kind of attitude, producing things, disappeared?

W: It's born in them. It's ingrained in them. It was just like I was telling you before. They came from an agricultural area. So most naturally what can they do best?

Y: Why didn't you do it? I mean you saw your father doing those things. What is the change?

W: The change was this. When I married I was making sixteen dollars a week, my wife was making sixteen dollars a week. Now that's double income. There's only two persons. So we want, we didn't have to have a garden. We went out and ours. Follow me? There's your answer. Then there was a few dollars you could put away in the bank if you had anything left. In those days there, I can remember back in the thirties, you could buy a car for six hundred dollars. Brand new! Six hundred dollars. Because when we use to go to church on Sunday, those that could afford it would drive up to the church, all shined up and everything, and show off their cars. You could buy a Pontiac for seven hundred, a Ford for five, six hundred.

Y: Yeah, actually I would like to ask you questions about work, but the other day Tony was telling me that his mother, who was also [unclear] (--) (W: I knew his family very well) He said during Easter time she used to make special dished for Easter. (W: Right, right) What are they?

W: Well you made Kilbasa, number one.

Y: That was made at home?

W: That was made at home. That's homemade Kilbasa. You buy the pork and everything, and you buy the casing in the store. And what they used to do is knock off, get a tonic bottle, a soda bottle, and knock it off so you'd have, you'd have your casing and you take the casing and put it up in the neck of the tonic bottle. And you push the meat down into the casing, and you keep filling it up, filling it up, until you have fresh Kilbasa.

Y: Did you do it?

W: Oh yeah, I could do it now. Easy. You put your spices in it, and everything else. That was number one. Then they had special bread they made.

Y: What was the name?

W: It was a raisin bread. Oh, what the heck (--)

Y: Whatever. Do you speak Lithuanian?

W: I do, but I forgot a lot of it, because I don't use it. In the last forty-fifty years I haven't spoken two words. So from non-use of it you forget a lot, but if I was say, a couple of hours with a person that spoke Lithuanian fluently, it would all come back to you eventually.

Y: Did they make wine, beer at home?

W: Yes. They made root beer. They also made beer. They also made whiskey.

Y: At your home?

W: No, my father never, never, never wanted to make whiskey, because too many of the neighbors among the Irish were caught and arrested, and he didn't want to be shamed. He never, he made beer. You made beer, the police wouldn't bother you, but if you made whiskey, they were up your house pretty fast, because of the smell of the whiskey would carry out to the streets.

Y: Do you know how to make beer?

W: No. I know the ingredients. Malt, [unclear], water, sugar.

Y: You never made, never tried?

W: No, I never tried it. My father also made rootbeer. And in order to make rootbeer foamy, it was a little trick. They used to buy week old rye bread, now listen to this, and cut it up, not in slices, but chunks, and just put it in where the rootbeer was, and let it age there for a week. You

had the foamiest rootbeer you ever had in your life? You open the bottle and nine tenths of it would be on the ceiling.

Y: Well you, I thought your father did not do anything, just worked. I mean uh, (W: Oh no! They had uh) he raised rabbit. He made rootbeer. He made beer. He(--)

W: But those are seasonal things. They don't make that year round. Come winter time, now you got to realize this. In the summertime you're busy outside. In the wintertime what do you do? You just can't work.

Y: What did he do?

W: Well in the wintertime he made his wine. In the late Fall he'd buy his grapes, or I would go out and pick choke cherries, or elderberries, whatever.

Y: Where?

W: In the woods.

Y: Yeah, I heard that before. Other people did the same thing.

W: We did. Sure! The woods were right around the house.

Y: What kind of berries grow there.

W: Well there were, like I told you, choke cherries. (Y: Choke cherries?) Yes. Then there were wild concord grapes, which made a delicious wine. And then there were elderberries. (Y: what berries?) Elderberries. That was just about it.

Y: What about blueberries, and those kinds.

W: Blueberries, yes. They made wine out of blueberries, but it was too expensive. Do you realize it was cheaper to pick it in the woods than it was to buy it.

Y: No, I was talking about the wood. What did you, what kind of berries did you pick up from woods. See, now that's (--)

W: Well elderberries. (Y: Yeah, you showed me them) Cherries.

Y: Right, right. Now what about apples? Did you steal apples when you were a kid?

W: Well I didn't have to steal apples, because there were no apples trees around where we lived. So I, we never were into that. But I imagine people who did live near the apple trees, the kids used to climb them and steal them. I know for a fact, because the kids used to tell us.

Y: Did you parents send money to Lithuania when they came here to their relatives?

W: The only thing that my parents ever sent was clothes. They couldn't afford to send money. Remember, my father worked all alone. There was no extra money to throw around to other people. Although they didn't, I know they did get letters asking for money, mostly money. Mostly money.

Y: From, from the relatives.

W: Yeah. But like I used to tell my father and mother, I says, you know, you people say you're not going to take care of us when we get old. This is my father and mother talking. I always used to say to my mother, now who did you take care of, because they fled the old country, and left the old folks there. She used to say, "well now we won't talk about that anymore." But they couldn't afford to send any money anyway. Unless your father had a good job. Then he could afford. Some did. I realize some did, but not very many. Not many. The whole population of Lithuania was only a million and a half, and there was a million people of Lithuania nationality in Chicago alone. A very small country.

Y: But you sent clothes?

W: Yeah, we sent clothes.

Y: [Comment unclear]

W: We don't know if they ever appreciated it, because we never got a letter saying that they were glad they got the clothes. So it could have been, you don't send me any money, no comment.

Y: Did you parents, are you bored? I enjoy talking to you. In fact (W: No, go ahead. You got a few more minutes), I mean if you are tired we can [unclear]. (W: No, no.) Um, did your parents treat your sisters and boys different in terms of [unclear].

W: Definitely. Yes, yes. That's one thing wrong with the European system. The first born is treated like a king. The last born, which is the youngest one is treated like a king. Anybody in between probably has to shit for themselves a lot, because the ones in between get all the hand-me-down clothes. Do you follow what I'm saying? The one is too young, he don't get me the hand-me down clothes, because there's no hand-me-down clothes left to give to him. So he gets brand new, the older one gets brand new. The ones in the middle (--) There's an old Italian saying, [unclear].

Y: So you were in the middle. (W: I was in the middle) So you suffered the most I guess.

W: Well, let's put it that way, right. Well that's the way it was. I know for a fact they do favor them that way. That was a wrong thing to do. They should have favored all the children alike.

Y: Yeah. Well what I was asking, towards the attitude towards work. So did they, do you think, did they prepare you as a boy, more assertive, more aggressive than your sisters?

W: No. No. No, all they wanted to do was have you go to school, stay out of trouble, and don't bother them. And I think 90% of the kids did that. Of course it depends on the circumstances of the money that's in the family. Now if your father, you can't say mother, because the women in those days didn't work too much. It was mostly male oriented society. On any job for that matter. They'd hire a man before they'd hire a woman, because they always said the man supports the family. Not today. Things have changed. But uh, in those days the women took a lot, took a lot on themselves and they were happy doing it. They ran, we were a matriarch society. Do you know what that word means? The women governed everything. Even to this day 89% of your wealth is governed by women.

Y: Well one minute ago you said that was male oriented society.

W: Male oriented when it came to George, I mean to jobs. (Y: jobs.) But when a man died, who did he leave his money too? Does that answer your question? A woman. So women amass all the wealth, and they still to this day do.

Y: So your mother was actually the boss at home?

W: Right, and the men let it go that way, because things ran smoothly that way. Well there might have been odd cases where they might, especially. No, I'll take that back, especially among the Italian people. The man was absolute monarch in his house.

Side II end